Good Bid'ah

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Source: 'Bid'ah - The Unique Nature of the Perfection found in Islaam and the Grave Danger of Innovating in



THE SAYING OF ALLAAH'S MESSENGER sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, *"EVERY BID'AH LEADS ASTRAY"*

And you should be amazed at a people who recognise the words of Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, *"Beware of the newly-invented matters, for every such matter is a bid'ah and every bid'ah leads astray, and everything that leads astray is in the Fire,"* [Reported by Aboo Daawood, Tirmidhee and others, no. 2549 in Saheehul-Jaami' without, *"... every thing that leads astray is in the Fire ..."*, and hadith no.28 in an-Nawawees Forty Hadith] and they know that his words, *"...every bid'ah..."* are complete, comprehensive and universal, being encompassed by the strongest grammatical particle used to make a noun universal and all-encompassing, i.e., kullu (which means everything), and (they know that) the one who used this word, may Allaah's salawaat and salaam be upon him, knew what this word indicated and he was the most eloquent of all (in the Arabic language) and he was the sincerest of the creation towards the creation. Hence he would not use a word unless its meaning was that which he intended. Hence (they know that) when the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"... every Bid'ah leads astray ..."* he knew what he was saying and he knew its meaning and this saying of his eminated as a result of complete sincerity and concern for the Ummah.

(They know that) when these three characteristics were all present in his words, i.e., complete sincerity and good wishes, complete clarity and eloquence and complete knowledge and understanding -then it is clear that what he said was what he wanted to say in order to convey his desired meaning. So (you should be amazed, that such a people, after recognising all this) think that bid'ah can be of three or five categories? Can this be correct? Never! And what some scholars do claim is that there exists the good innovation. But if this is so, then they can only be referring to two cases:

(i) that it is not an innovation but they do consider it to be one, or

(ii) it is an innovation, and hence it is something evil, but they do not know of its evil.

(And these are the only two possibilities, bearing in mind that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"... every bid'ah leads astray ..."*)

THE SHARP SWORD AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF INNOVATION

So for everything that is used to claim that there exists a good bid'ah, then the answer for it is all the above. Thus there can be no room for the People of Innovation to claim that their innovations are good while we have in our hand the sharp sword that Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam gave us - i.e., his saying that *"... every innovation leads astray."*

Indeed, this sharp sword was forged in the steel-works of Prophethood and Messengership. It was not forged in some second rate iron-mill, rather in the steelworks of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam forged it so eloquently, that anyone who has the likes of this sharp sword in his hand would never be dumb-founded by someone claiming that bid'ah is good, for the Messenger of Allaah sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said that, *"...every bid'ah leads astray."*

WHAT ABOUT THE SAYING OF 'UMAR radiallaahu 'anhu I AM PLEASED WITH THAT BID'AH?

Now I can sense that there is in your hearts a creeping doubt saying, 'But what about the words of the Chief of the Believers 'Umar bin al-Khattab radiallaahu 'anhu who succeeded in achieving something good when he ordered Ubayy ibn Ka'b and Tameem ad-Daaree to lead the people in prayer during Ramadaan. Hence he left having united the people behind a (single) Imaam, and so said, "I am happy with this innovation, but the part of the night they used to sleep through is better than the part they use to pray in." [Reported by al-Bukhaaree, (Eng. trans. vol. 3, p. 126, no.227).]

The reply to this is from two angles. Firstly, it is not permitted for anyone to oppose the saying of the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam by preferring the opinion of any other - be it the opinion of Abu Bakr who is better than anyone else in this ummah after its Prophet, or that of 'Umar who is the second best after its Prophet, or 'Uthmaan who is the third best after its Prophet, or 'Alee who is the fourth best after its Prophet or that of anyone else. As Allah, the Most High, says:

> **"So let those who oppose his (Muhammad's sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) command beware that they will be afflicted with a trial or a painful punishment." (24: 63)**

Imaam Ahmad rahimahullaah said, 'Do you know what the trial mentioned here is? The trial is shirk - perhaps when someone opposes the Prophet's saying, some deviation may affect his heart such that he will be destroyed.' And Ibn Abbaas radiallaahu 'anhu said, 'Stones are about to be sent down from the sky! I say that, 'Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said so and so ...' while you reply with what Aboo Bakr and 'Umar said!'

Secondly, we know for certain that 'Umar ibn al-Khattab radiallaahu 'anhu was one of the strongest in glorifying the Words of Allaah and His Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam and he was famous for halting short of the limits laid down by Allaah, the Most High. To the extent that he was attributed with being a warden and safe-guard of the Speech of Allaah, the Most High.

And what about the story of that woman who opposed him, (assuming it is authentic), when he wanted to limit the dowries, by an unknown amount? Then a woman opposed him using the Saying of Allaah, the Most High:

> **"And (even if) you gave one of them a huge amount (of gold)." [4:20]**

Hence 'Umar abandoned his wish to limit the dowries. However, the authenticity of this story needs to be looked into. But the point is clear - that 'Umar would safeguard the limits laid down by Allaah, the Most High, and would not transgress them. So it would not be befitting for 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu being who he was, to oppose the words of the best of mankind, Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam by saying 'What a pleasing innovation about any

bid'ah. So can this innovation be that which Allaah's Messenger was referring to when he said that *"... every innovation leads astray ..."*? No. Rather it can be said with certainity that this innovation about which 'Umar said, 'I am pleased with this innovation ...' falls outside what was intended by Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam when he said, *"... every bid'ah leads astray."* Thus when 'Umar said, 'I am pleased with this innovation ...' he was referring to the effect - that the people had gathered together behind one Imaam while before that, they were (praying) in separate groups. And this praying (behind a single Imaam) during Ramadhan had its origin from the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, as is proven from that which is reported by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from 'Aa'ishah, may Allaah be pleased with her, that the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam led the people in prayer for three nights and then hesitated doing so on the fourth night, saying, *"Indeed I feared that it would become obligatory upon you, but you would not be able to cope with that."* [Reported by Bukhaaree (Eng. trans. vol.1, no.696) and Muslim (Eng. trans. vol.1, no.1666].

Thus performing the night prayer in Ramadaan as a single Jamaa'ah is from the Sunnah of the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, and 'Umar radiallaahu 'anhu referred to it as a 'bid'ah' considering the fact that after the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam had left leading the prayer, the people became separated such that one person would he praying alone, and elsewhere two would be praying together, and somewhere else three would be praying in Jamaa'ah. So throughout the mosque there were people praying alone and in groups, so 'Umar, the chief of the Believers, had the idea - and this idea was perfectly correct - to gather the people to pray behind a single Imaam. So this action was an innovation in the sense that it was new and different to how the people were before, i.e., praying in separate groups. Hence this bid'ah was relative and subjective - not original and absolute, being set up by Umar radiallaahu 'anhu, as this sunnah was there during the time of the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam So it indeed was a Sunnah (not a bid'ah), which had been abandoned since the time of the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, until Umar radiallaahu 'anhu revived it.

As a result of all this, it should never be possible for the People of Innovation to use this saying of 'Umar as a way to condone their bid'ah.

AHKAAM AL-MAQAASID

Now someone could say: There are a number of innovated things that the Muslims have approved of and acted upon that were not known of during the time of the Prophet ~ Such as religious schools, compiling books and the like. These innovations have been condoned by the Muslims and they have acted upon them and considered them to be some of the most excellent ideas. So how can you harmonise this - where the Muslims are almost unanimous in considering these things to be good - with that saying of the Leader and Prophet of all the Muslims, the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds (Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam, where he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"..every bid'ah leads astray."*?

So in reply, we say that these things in these circumstances are not innovations, rather they are a means towards achieving that which is already from the sharee'ah. And these means will differ according to the location and the time, but there are established rules for them. One such rule is that their permissibility depends on the goal, i.e., those means that are used to achieve a prescribed matter are themselves prescribed; those means that are used to achieve something that is not ordained are themselves not ordained; and those means used to achieve the forbidden are themselves forbidden. Even something good maybe evil and forbidden if it necessarily leads to evil. Listen to Allaah, the Mighty and Glorious, when He says:

"Do not insult those whom they call upon, instead of calling upon Allah, for they may insult Allaah out of hostility and ignorance" [6:108]

Yet cursing the gods of the mushriks is not wrong, rather it is correct and quite proper. However cursing the Lord of all the Worlds is indeed wrong, improper, hostile and a transgression. Therefore, where this praiseworthy insulting of the gods of the mushriks is a cause that leads to Allaah being insulted, then it becomes prohibited and forbidden. I have put this forward to show that the means are according to their related goal. Hence regarding schools, writing down knowledge and compiling books, then even though they are innovations, in the sense that they were not found during the time of Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam nevertheless they are not goals in themselves, but are means, and the means are according to their goals. So, for example, if someone were to set up a school to teach forbidden matters, then this act of setting up the school woudld be forbidden. If a person were to set up a school in order to teach knowledge of the sharee'ah, then this act would be good and sanctioned by Islaam.

WHAT ABOUT THE SAYING OF THE PROPHET sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam *"WHOEVER ENACTS A GOOD SUNNAH ..."?*

What if someone asks: How do you respond to what the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said i.e., *"Whoever enacts a good sunnah into Islam, he will get the reward of it and of all those who act upon it up to the Day of Judgement,"* with the verb Sanna (i.e., 'enact') meaning Shara'a i.e., to introduce or to prescribe?

The reply to this is: Who is the one who said, *"Whoever enacts a good sunnah into Islaam ... ?"* He is the same one who also said, *"... every bid'ah leads astray."* It is not possible for a phrase to eminate from someone who is truthful and proven to be truthful, such that it would deny and negate another phrase of his, and it is absolutely impossible for any speech of Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam to be self-contradictory, nor is it possible to refute any particular meaning by claiming it to be contradictory. Whoever thinks that the words of Allaah's Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam are self-contradictory, then let him look again, for indeed this kind of thought eminates from a person possessing thoughts that are either deficient or limited. Indeed it is completely impossible that one would find a contradiction in the words of Allaah, the Most High, or that of His Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam.

If this is so, then it should be clear that the hadith, *"... every innovation leads astray ..."* does not contradict the hadith *"Whoever enacts a good sunnah into Islaam ..."* for the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"Whoever enacts a good sunnah into Islaam...,"* while innovations are not from Islaam. And he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said *"... a good sunnah ..."* while innovation is not good. So he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam made a distinction between enacting a Sunnah on the one hand and enacting an innovation on the other.

In any case, there is a reply that no one should have a problem with - that the meaning of, *"Whoever enacts a sunnah ..."* is, 'Whoever revives a sunnah that was present and then was lost.' Therefore it means that a matter has been revived, and thus in this way "... enacting a sunnah ..."is relative and secondary just as (in the case of 'Umar, where his use of) the word bid'ah (innovation) was relative and secondary in the sense that it involved the revival of a sunnah that had been abandoned.

There is even a second reply that can be given: That is the background of the whole hadith,

for it is a story concerning the tribe that came to see the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam while being in exceptionally difficult circumstances. So the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam urged that donations be given to them, and hence one man form the Ansaar came forward with a bag of silver in his hand which was almost too heavy for him to carry. He placed it down before the Messenger sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam This made the face of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam glow with joy and happiness and so he said, *"Whoever enacts a good sunnnah into Islaam will have the reward of it and the reward of oil those who act upon it until the Day of Resurrection."* So we have here that the meaning of *" ... enacting a sunnah ..."* means to enact an action in the sense of implementing it and not in the sense of setting up a new thing into the sharee'ah. Hence the meaning of his sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam saying, *"Whoever enacts a good sunnah into Islaam ..."* turns out to be, 'Whoever acts upon a good sunnah in the sense of implementing it as opposed to introducing a new thing in the sharee'ah,' for that would be prohibited as he sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, *"... every bid'ah leads astray."*